

Department Use of Social Media

320.1 VERSION

Agency Content

Review Date	Effective Date	Approving Authority
02/27/19	07/09/18	Eric D. English, Chief of Police

320.2 POLICY AND PURPOSE

Best Practice **MODIFIED**

The Harrisonburg Police Department will use social media as a method of effectively informing the public about department services, issues, investigations, recruitment and other relevant events.

This policy provides guidelines to ensure that any use of social media on behalf of the Department is consistent with the department mission.

This policy does not address all aspects of social media use. Specifically, it does not address:

- Personal social media accounts.
- Use of social media in personnel processes (see the Recruitment and Selection Policy).
- Use of social media as part of a criminal investigation, other than disseminating information to the public on behalf of this department (see [Harrisonburg Police Department Policy Manual: 500.8 INVESTIGATIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET SOURCES](#)).

320.3 ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

Agency Content

All employees are expected to fully comply with the guidelines and timelines set forth in this policy. Responsibility rests with the supervisor to ensure that any violations of policy are investigated and appropriate training, counseling and/or disciplinary action is initiated. This directive is for internal use only, and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

320.4 DEFINITIONS

Best Practice **MODIFIED**

Social media - Any of a wide array of Internet-based tools and platforms that allow for the sharing of information, such as the department website or social networking services.

320.5 AUTHORIZED USERS

Best Practice **MODIFIED**

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Only employees authorized by the Chief of Police or the authorized designee may utilize social media on behalf of the Department. Authorized employees shall use only department-approved equipment during the normal course of duties to post and monitor department-related social media, unless they are specifically authorized to do otherwise by their supervisors.

The Chief of Police may develop specific guidelines identifying the type of content that may be posted. Any content that does not strictly conform to the guidelines should be approved by a Public Information Officer (PIO) and/or supervisor prior to posting.

Requests to post information over department social media by members who are not authorized to post should be made through the member's chain of command.

320.6 AUTHORIZED CONTENT

Best Practice

Only content that is appropriate for public release, that supports the department mission and that conforms to all department policies regarding the release of information may be posted.

Examples of appropriate content include:

- (a) Announcements.
- (b) Tips and information related to crime prevention.
- (c) Investigative requests for information.
- (d) Requests that ask the community to engage in projects that are relevant to the department mission.
- (e) Real-time safety information that is related to in-progress crimes, geographical warnings or disaster information.
- (f) Traffic information.
- (g) Media releases.
- (h) Recruitment of personnel.

320.6.1 INCIDENT-SPECIFIC USE

Best Practice **MODIFIED**

In instances of active incidents where speed, accuracy and frequent updates are paramount (e.g., crime alerts, public safety information, traffic issues), the Public Information Officer or the authorized designee will be responsible for the compilation of information to be released, subject to the approval of the Incident Commander.

320.7 PROHIBITED CONTENT

Best Practice **MODIFIED**

Content that is prohibited from posting includes, but is not limited to:

- (a) Content that is abusive, discriminatory, inflammatory or sexually explicit.
- (b) Any information that violates individual rights, including confidentiality and/or privacy rights and those provided under state, federal or local laws.

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- (c) Any information that could compromise an ongoing investigation.
- (d) Any information that could tend to compromise or damage the mission, function, reputation or professionalism of the Harrisonburg Police Department or its employees.
- (e) Any information that could compromise the safety and security of department operations, employees of the Department, victims, suspects or the public.
- (f) Any content posted for personal use.
- (g) Any content that has not been properly authorized by this policy or a supervisor.

Any employee who becomes aware of content on this department's social media site that he/she believes is unauthorized or inappropriate should promptly report such content to a supervisor. The supervisor will ensure its removal from public view and investigate the cause of the entry.

320.7.1 PUBLIC POSTING PROHIBITED

Best Practice MODIFIED

Department social media sites shall be designed and maintained to prevent posting of original content by the public. This does not prohibit community members from commenting on the department's social media posts.

The Department may provide a method for members of the public to contact department employees directly.

See the City of Harrisonburg policy for further assistance: http://citycentral.harrisonburgva.gov/sites/default/files/it/files/Social_Media_Policy_-_signed.pdf

320.8 MONITORING CONTENT

Best Practice MODIFIED

Social Media content should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to monitor effectiveness of the content, any unauthorized or inappropriate content and the resolution of any issues.

320.9 RETENTION OF RECORDS

Best Practice

The Administrative Bureau Commander should work with the Custodian of Records to establish a method of ensuring that public records generated in the process of social media use are retained in accordance with established records retention schedules.

320.10 TRAINING

Best Practice MODIFIED

Authorized employees should receive training that, at a minimum, addresses legal issues concerning the appropriate use of social media sites, as well as privacy, civil rights, dissemination and retention of information posted on department sites.